NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FH
NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-1149 JULY 22, 1976
CHARLES MEDD

THE JOBS BILL AND 1976 POLITICS

ANNCR:

THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS HAS ENACTED A FOUR THOUSAND MILLION DOLLAR PUBLIC WORKS BILL OVER PRESIDENT FORD'S EARLIER VETO. CHARLES MEDD LOOKS AT THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS LATEST CONFRONTATION BETWEEN A REPUBLICAN WHITE HOUSE AND A DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS.

VOICE:

SPONSORS OF THE BILL CLAIM IT WILL CREATE SOME THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND NEW JOBS, VITAL -- THEY SAY -- TO BRING UNEMPLOYMENT DOWN AND TO KEEP THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY GOING. OPPONENTS, INCLUDING PRESIDENT FORD, CALL IT AN ELECTION-YEAR GIVE-AWAY, AN INFLATIONARY MEASURE DESIGNED NOT TO PUT PEOPLE BACK TO WORK BUT TO GET THEIR VOTES IN NOVEMBER. BY THEN, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WILL HAVE HEARD BOTH SIDES OF THE ARGUMENT AND WILL PERHAPS BE ABLE TO JUDGE WHAT IS LIKELY TO BE A KEY POLITICAL ISSUE BETWEEN THE DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS.

THE CLASH OVER THE PUBLIC WORKS BILL UNDERSCORES THE ESSENTIAL PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES. THE REPUBLICANS, BY AND LARGE BELIEVE THE ECONOMY WORKS BEST WITH A MINIMUM OF GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION. THEY ARGUE THAT EXPENSIVE JOB PROGRAMS CREATE INFLATION THAT BURDENS BOTH THE NATIONAL BUDGET AND THE TAX-PAYER WITHOUT REALLY HELPING THOSE WHO NEED WORK. MOST DEMOCRATS BELIEVE IN A MORE ACTIVIST GOVERNMENT WHICH, WHEN NECESSARY, WILL SERVE AS A TEMPORARY EMPLOYER. THEY SAY THAT UNEMPLOYMENT IS ITSELF EXPENSIVE BOTH IN MONETARY AND HUMAN TERMS, THAT A BALANCED BUDGET IS LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE SOCIAL COST OF AN

IDLE WORK FORCE.

LAST FEBRUARY, PRESIDENT FORD REJECTED A SIMILAR BUT LARGER VERSION OF THE SAME BILL, AND CONGRESSIONAL DEMOCRATS, DESPITE THEIR ONE-SIDED MAJORITIES, LACKED THE TWO-THIRDS VOTE NEEDED TO OVERTURN THE VETO. THE NEW VERSION -- MODIFIED TO MEET SOME OF THE EARLIER CRITICISM -- WILL ALLOCATE TWO THOUSAND MILLION DOLLARS TO STIMULATE CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND A SOMEWHAT SMALLER AMOUNT TO HELP FINANCIALLY-PRESSED STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. THIS TIME, THERE WERE ENOUGH REPUBLICAN DEFECTIONS TO ENABLE THE DEMOCRATS TO DEFEAT THE PRESIDENT'S VETO.

AT THEIR NATIONAL CONVENTION LAST WEEK, THE DEMOCRATS ADOPTED A PLATFORM THAT VIRTUALLY PROMISES A JOB FOR EVERY AMERICAN ADULT WILLING TO WORK, A PROMISE THAT IS CERTAIN TO BE A CRITICAL DEBATING POINT IN THE COMING CAMPAIGN. WITH SEVEN AND ONE-HALF MILLION AMERICANS OUT OF JOBS, THAT PLATFORM PLEDGE -- AND THE NEW PUBLIC WORKS BILL -- WILL HAVE AN OBVIOUS POLITICAL APPEAL. HOW MUCH APPEAL WILL DEPEND ON THE NUMBER OF VOTERS WHO ARE WORRIED ABOUT INFLATION AND WHO ARE NOT ALTOGETHER CONVINCED THAT IT'S THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO CREATE JOBS.

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